

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “#CommActUpdate: Perspectives from Former FCC Chairmen”
January 15, 2014

(As Prepared for Delivery)

In December, Chairman Walden and I announced our plans for a comprehensive update to the Communications Act of 1934. The changes in technology since the last update in 1996 have been dramatic and existing laws have failed to keep pace with the vibrant and dynamic telecommunications industry. The communications and technology sectors have consistently been areas of American leadership, innovation, and job creation, but the Communications Act is showing its age and our continued international leadership is at stake. Yesterday's net neutrality decision, while a victory for consumers and the economy, illustrates the uncertainty flowing from the current statutory scheme and the need for this action. It's time to revamp these laws to reflect the new competitive landscape and changing consumer expectations.

As we begin the open process leading to a #CommActUpdate, we are looking for input from all of the stakeholders in the communications and technology world. Where better to start than with our distinguished panel of former leaders of the Federal Communications Commission. These leaders served during diverse times in the evolution of the communications sector. They've seen the market operate under the strong hand of the U.S. government and the challenges with then divorcing the government from its heavy regulation of the communications sector. They've seen cable grow from its days as a struggling startup. They've seen satellite services succeed in bringing competition to the video market – and fail to find success as a competitor to mobile phone service. And, they've seen the Internet grow from a DoD project, to a tool for research universities, and now as the commercial economic force that we know today. Throughout the many nuanced iterations of the Communications Act, today's witnesses have seen firsthand the Act at its finest and also when it's inability to keep pace with technological innovation has impacted these vital economic sectors.

I thank the witnesses for taking time to share their experiences with us. We value their expertise and welcome their thoughts on how we can ensure that the Communications Act fosters our communications and technology sectors well into the 21st century.

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